

Are Fish and Wildlife Habitats Being Protected and Restored?

A habitat is a place where plants and animals live. While there is still much healthy habitat in and around Long Island Sound, the overall abundance and diversity of habitats have diminished. Incompatible human uses of the Sound and its resources since the 1700s have resulted in the loss of wetlands, eelgrass beds, and terrestrial habitats. The good news is that many habitats are now protected and restoration is occurring.

In 1998, the LISS Habitat Restoration Initiative adopted goals to restore 2000 acres of coastal habitat (e.g. dunes, inland wetlands, tidal wetlands, forests, submerged aquatic vegetation) by the year 2008. In addition, bi-state efforts are focusing on open space protection. For example, in 1999, Connecticut acquired 2,910 acres for open space at a cost of nearly \$10.6 million, while assisting municipalities, land trusts, and water companies with the purchase of another 4,203 acres with \$10 million through the state Department of Environmental Protection's Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant program. New York State has an Open Space Management Plan that lists the region around Long Island Sound as a priority for land acquisition.

Miles of Stream Accessible to Anadromous Fish

Anadromous fish live in the ocean but swim up rivers to reproduce in fresh water. The migration of anadromous fish such as alewives, smelt, blueback herring, American shad, and Atlantic salmon have been limited by physical barriers (including dams, culverts, tide gates, and sections of river with inadequate water volume) that block access to spawning areas. These travel routes are now being made accessible through fishways and bypasses, removal of obstacles, and altering dam releases.

In 1998, LISS adopted a goal of restoring 100 miles of riverine migratory corridors for anadromous fish within ten years. In the past two years, 33.4 river miles have been opened to anadromous fish, leaving 66.6 miles of riverine migratory corridors to be restored by the year 2008.

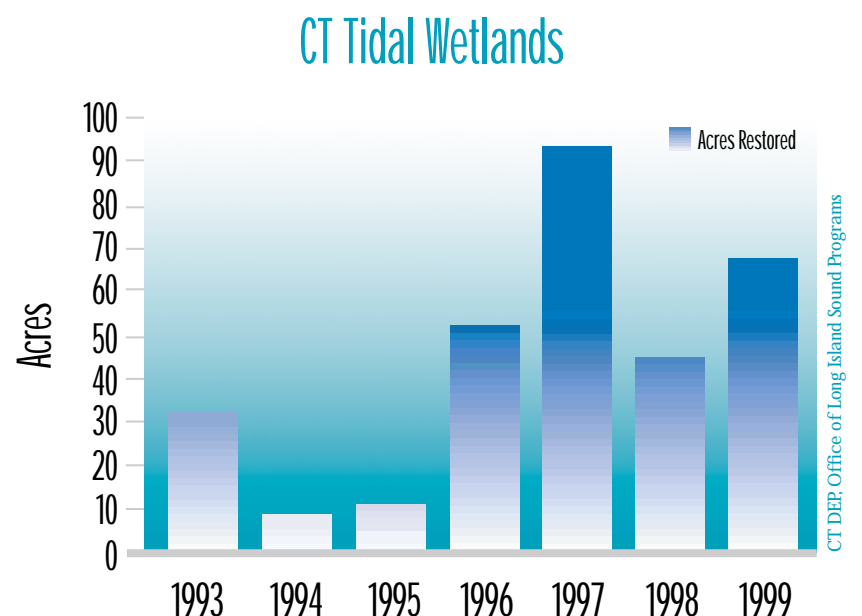


Photo by Kim Zimmer

Acres of Tidal Wetlands Restored

Tidal wetlands, or marshes, are grasslands located between land and sea that form an important link to adjacent estuaries. Tidal wetlands are among the most productive ecosystems in the world. Decaying marsh grass fragments that wash into Long Island Sound are an important part of the food web, supporting many species of fish, invertebrates, and birds. Marshes provide food, shelter, and breeding or nursery grounds for many species of wildlife. Marshes also protect the land from flooding and erosion in stormy weather and filter pollutants from the water.

Approximately 25 percent to 35 percent of the Sound's tidal wetlands had been destroyed over the past 100 years by filling, dredging, and development. This trend was halted following passage of federal and state legislation in the early 1970s to protect tidal wetlands. The emphasis is now on restoration. Both Connecticut and New York have funds dedicated to wetland restoration. Connecticut has restored 1500 acres of tidal wetlands since the early 1970s. New York has restored about 65 acres of tidal wetlands since passage of the 1996 Clean Air/Clean Water Bond Act. Tidal wetland restoration is an integral part of the LISS goal to restore 2000 acres of coastal habitats by the year 2008.



Since 1993, more than 308 acres of tidal wetland habitat have been restored in Connecticut. Since 1996, New York has restored approximately 65 acres of tidal wetlands. Additional restoration projects are underway.